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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001278

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: VP ADEL ABDEL MEHDI ON SFA, IRAN, AND CRACKDOWN ON
SADR'S MILITIA

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Just back from a meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi told the Ambassador on April 23 that Maliki agrees with the USG vision of a two-track negotiation process that will yield a single SOFA/Strategic Framework Agreement. He said Maliki had recounted a tense meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki on the margins of the April 22 Neighbors Conference, claiming he had complained of Iranian provision of arms and training to Iraqi militias. The Ambassador urged Adel and other top GOI leaders to send a clear message directly to Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei that Iran's destabilizing actions must stop. Adel replied that, above all, the Iranians do not want the Maliki government to fail and this gives the GOI a "strong card to play." Adel asserted that Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) had exhausted the bulk of its fighting ability in Basrah, adding that "this is a good moment for the GOI to gain control over Sadr City." The Ambassador cautioned that a decisive security operation in Sadr City must be accompanied with a GOI-led economic assistance plan to win the populace away from JAM. End Summary.

Agreement on SOFA/SFA Modalities

12. (C) Adel explained to the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield that he had just come from an extended meeting with Prime Minister Maliki and President Talabani. Adel said the group had discussed ongoing bilateral negotiations of a SOFA and Strategic Framework Agreement, adding that Maliki said he agreed with the USG proposal of a two-track negotiation process that will yield a single agreement. While GOI technical experts will continue SOFA talks, deputies of the Executive Committee members (Maliki, Talabani and the two Vice Presidents) and a representative of Masoud Barzani will negotiate the Strategic Framework portion. They will be joined by Deputy Foreign Minister Hamoud, who is the GOI's chief SOFA negotiator, and together the negotiators will regularly apprise their bosses and the GOI Political Committee for National Security of progress. Adel said fellow Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi was also in agreement with this approach. Adel stated he will likely depute ISCI CoR chief Humam Hamoudi and Badr supremo Hadi al-Amri to represent him in negotiations. The Ambassador stressed the importance that all deputed negotiators be fully empowered to negotiate and remain in close contact with their bosses, recalling that problems and delay arose when the deputies negotiated the August 2007 "Leaders' Communique."

Iranian Intervention

13. (C) In further reference to his meeting with Maliki, Adel said the PM had briefed on a tense meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki on the margins of the April 22 Neighbors Conference, claiming Maliki had complained of

Iranian provision of arms and training to Iraqi militias. Furthermore, Maliki reportedly told Mottaki he would present a formal report containing proof to back up these accusations. He said Maliki had also sounded a strong message when he met with Syrian Foreign Minister Mu'allam. The Ambassador mentioned that MNF-I was preparing a public presentation of evidence it has obtained of direct Iranian arms supply and training to JAM militants. Adel cautioned that MNF-I presentation might "escalate" tensions and suggested that the GOI make the case instead, particularly as it might fit in well with the report Maliki is building to present to the Iranian government. The Ambassador said he would raise the matter at an upcoming meeting with Maliki. Picking up on a point the Secretary made with Adel and other senior GOI leaders during an April 20 lunch meeting, the Ambassador said it was clear that Iran was not dealing with Iraq as a normal, sovereign nation but instead had ceded Iraq policy to Quds Force commander Qassim Suleimani and was treating Iraq as it did Lebanon or the Palestinians. He urged Adel and other top GOI leaders to send a clear, united message directly to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that Iran's destabilizing actions in Iraq must stop.

14. (C) Adel replied that while Iran has used Iraq as a platform from which to attack the U.S., above all the Iranians do not want the Maliki government to fail and this gives the GOI a "strong card to play" when dealing with Tehran. The GOI crackdown on Iran-aided armed groups in Basrah was vitally important "and showed how things should be done" in dealing with Iran. Adel stated that Suleimani had warned Iraqis that operations near the Iranian border, such as the Basrah operation, was a "red line" for Tehran but did not try to stop the GOI when it showed resolve and firmness. He asserted that the Iranians had made the calculation that

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the fall of the Maliki government is dangerous to their interests, and the GOI must take advantage of this calculation. When asked about the health condition of ISCI Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, Adel replied that Hakim had been in poor health since his return 10 days ago from ongoing cancer treatment in Iran (last week he had a fever of 104 degrees) but is currently on the mend.

GOI Anti-Militia Operations

15. (C) Adel said that just as the GOI was firm and resolute in Basrah, it must continue to be strong in its crackdown on armed militias in Sadr City: "this is a good moment for the GOI to gain control over Sadr City." The Ambassador stated that the GOI campaign against armed groups is defining Iraq's future under the principle that no group other than GOI security forces may bear weapons: however, the campaign must be accompanied by political and economic measures and an emphasis that the operation is not aimed at the entire Sadrist movement. Sadr City must not be allowed to degenerate into something resembling Beirut's southern suburbs to be used by a Hizbollah-like entity. He also urged the GOI to continue the work begun in the south and to work with southern tribes, particularly in Maysan, where people have grown disillusioned with militias and Iranian influence.

16. (C) In reply to Adel's question about GOI/MNF-I military progress in the Sadr City area, the Ambassador replied that forces are consolidating gains made in recent days by installing barriers around cleared areas. He stressed the importance of quickly following up on such gains with a GOI-led, GOI-executed economic plan to show area residents what life can be like without a JAM presence, and noted he would raise this point in his meeting with Maliki. The Ambassador said Baghdad's Mayor had already held meetings on improving local government delivery of services in Sadr City, and the Deputy Mayor -- a Sadrist -- has participated in such meetings. Adel stated his belief that JAM had expended the

bulk of its fighting power in late-March: by controlling entry/exit points and by methodically establishing a district-by-district presence, the GOI and Coalition can gain control over Sadr City just as it did in the once-troubled Karrada area. The Ambassador again emphasized the importance of an accompanying economic package to take away JAM's ability to posture as "defender of the oppressed."

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